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# THE THEOSOPHICAL FORUM.

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*Each member can send questions, answers to questions, opinions, and notes upon Theosophical subjects. When necessary, the various communications will be condensed by the editor. Members will be careful to write on only one side of the paper and to use black ink.*

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FOR PARAGRAPHS UNDER THE WORD "ANS." THE EDITOR IS PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE.

*December, 1893.*

## QUESTION CCLXVIII.

*If the cause of rebirth is in unsatisfied desire to live (Tanha), why should they be reborn who are weary of life and have no desire to continue or repeat it?*

*Ans.*— In the case of suicides there may not be necessarily a distaste for all life, but only for that particular phase of it the suicide has experienced. Poverty, sickness, heart-ache might make the existing incarnation unendurable, while there might be very eager desire for a career prosperous, healthy, full of love. It is probable that most suicides would gladly stay on earth if they could be guaranteed instant removal of the sorrows which have made life repulsive.

This is largely true of others who, without contemplating self-murder, find trouble hard to bear and their present incarnation with few meliorations. If some beneficent Power could assure that the sorrows afflicting them should at once vanish and the joys they covet be at once conferred, it is almost cer

tain that the offer would be eagerly accepted and a new chapter of life under satisfactory conditions be forthwith opened. For the weariness is not with life itself; it is with the environment which makes it hard. A life full of the enjoyments most congenial would be the boon most desired.

Still, there are undoubtedly natures which have reached the point of conviction that all terrestrial satisfactions are imperfect and that no increase or variety of them could largely change the result. If a man holds that as a fact, and if, still more, he feels that no existence hampered with a physical body can ever be free from limitations, risks, and positive evils, he may very well sigh for an existence released from such and so look upon another incarnation as a dread and a pain. Where, then, would be the "unsatisfied desire to live," and the consequent cause for a fresh birth?

Yet it may be that even in such cases there are hidden and unsuspected desires, desires far below the surface and with roots in unexplored recesses of being, desires which must have their necessary outcome in a reïncarnation. This is the more probable when we remember that no man thoroughly knows his present nature, much less that part of it coming over from the past, and may therefore mistake a superficial feeling for a central conviction. Karmic factors, too, are involved, and one element may be certain incomplete experiences in which lies latent a wish for opportunity to perfect them. Of course Karmic awards would not be a reason for rebirth if the causative impulsion to rebirth lay alone in desire for life, but it is quite possible that Karmic operations may enfold within themselves that desire as an inseparable element.

But may there not be natures from which all wish for terrestrial life has utterly been expunged, partly because sad experience has made it repulsive, partly because there is conviction that repetition would make no change, partly because the thought of numberless incarnations fills with inexpressible weariness? And if so, why is not the causative impulse absent, and why should not the welcome extinction come? Ah, who can say! Perhaps the reason for rebirth is in the dictate from Supreme Wisdom that such evolution is best for the individual

in the end, however little it may seem so at any one time, and so that the Wisdom and the rebirths will finally vindicate themselves to the mind and heart of the subject, rather than in any particular fondness of Egos for earth-life. If the actual system had not been the best conceivable it would not have been adopted by the All-Wise, and if it is the best it cannot be waived in special cases because of their desire. Law would cease to be such if upset whenever the subject of it felt hostile. And so we may confidently fall back upon the belief that the system must really be true and good, and that, being so, one should conform his convictions to it. We may not desire to come back; even the thought of return may depress; and yet, calmly and resolutely, we can bow before an arrangement which expresses the judgment of Infinite Wisdom as to the happiest results in our ultimate destiny.

*W. Q. J.*—There is slight but important inaccuracy in the doctrinal statement of the question, and the question also leaves out of account the desires of life counting from the cradle as well as those desires of other and past lives which were never satisfied.

The inaccuracy is, that it is *not* the doctrine that *unsatisfied* desire leads to rebirth, but that desire is the cause of rebirth, and this makes a great difference in the matter. The want of satisfaction of desire only adds another element leading to rebirth. Desire of any sort, satisfied or not, deludes the Ego, and it is thereby drawn into the magnetic attractions (from which through ignorance it cannot escape) which must and will operate in time to cause rebirth. The desire operates the instant it is entertained, and, sinking into the inner recesses of being, is a cause for rebirth. The mere fact that it is forgotten or that all earthly life in time becomes distasteful does not do away with its force in those parts of our nature which while we are ignorant remain hidden from us. For with each desire —and there are millions of them—there is a thought, and it is these thoughts which make the bonds which draw us back to earth. And with each person this goes on for many years, for

but few children are wise enough to control desires. This immense mass of desires and thoughts is to be taken into account. The question appears to ignore them altogether. If in mature years one begins to see the futility and uselessness of desire for life or any other desire, it means that experience has been gained, but not by any means that the forces engendered during preceding years have been exhausted.

Furthermore, there is behind each one the whole sum of other lives with all their desires, much of which must be yet unexhausted. These are each a cause for rebirth.

And it is not merely the desire to live which causes rebirth. That is a prime cause, and one that being seated in general human nature is more subtle and powerful than any other, for it relates to life itself, no matter where. And I take it that if the person who says life here seems worthless were offered life on some other planet in most harmonious, beautiful, and gratifying circumstances, he would find the deeply seated *wish for life* suddenly blazing up, causing him to immediately accept the offer.

*Claude F. Wright.*—The statement made by many persons that they are tired of life and desire only annihilation carries with it no proof of its truth. The mere statement is not sufficient, for the sentiment may be only a momentary gloss of the mind and form no part of the real character. In considering the causes and effects productive of and springing from the "will to live," the permanent individuality rather than the emotion of an hour or of a few weeks has to be taken into account. If any man really desired death in any moment, in that moment would it come as surely as it comes to all men in the hour of reckoning with Nature. But when one says he desires annihilation, it is frequently merely a way of saying that he would give a good deal for some kind of change. Present conditions are disagreeable perhaps, so much so that even a cessation of existence would be preferable to the temporary hell in which he lives. So he desires death. An element of curiosity may be in the character also: he would like to try annihilation

—just for a while, we suppose, to see what it would be like! We may believe, with Heine, that when a suicide gives "tired of life" as the motive of his self-destruction he has but imperfectly analysed his motive; his unsuspected desire is for "more life and better", not for a passage into the void.

Similarly, he who is reborn or even continues to live as a human being after repeated assertions to his friends and to himself that there is nothing he desires more fervently than annihilation or at least Nirvana, had better set to work to fathom his sentiment and see what its floor is really composed of. The aged person who blesses the advent of the hour when he shall "shuffle off this mortal coil" is frequently in one prolonged day-dream about the had-been or the might-have-been, and were a sudden revolution of the wheel of life to bring him at the moment when he is thus welcoming death and possible extinction of consciousness, back again to the sunny hours of childhood and youth, his delight in life would return with alacrity. And with most persons in youth or middle life, the desire to slip from human life is merely a pointer to the fact that there is some unsatisfied desire in their inmost nature.

It is only the practical occultist who knows how to escape the round of rebirth, and he succeeds in this not by emotionally dreaming of extinction, but by determinedly setting himself to exhaust the Karmic attachments which bind him in the terrestrial atmosphere.

Unless one has attained some degree of spiritual perception it is unnatural and abnormal to desire cessation of life, whether human or otherwise. When one has attained that perception, then the Karma here exhausts itself naturally. While the cause of rebirth may be, and, indeed, is, the unsatisfied desire to live (that is, as a human being), it does not follow that the desire "not to live" will occasion extinction or entrance into Nirvana. It is impossible really to desire not to live; for life is inherent in all the Cosmos. There is no such thing as non-being during a Manvantara. We can desire a more spiritual existence; but that desire is rarely voiced in the sentiment "weary of life".

## QUESTION CCLXIX.

*My own experience, and the statements of candid and observing men like Mr. Sinnett, convince me that intelligent beings "on the other side" sometimes—perhaps frequently—communicate with mortals through sight and sound, sometimes voluntarily, at other times by solicitation, both by night and in strong light, natural and artificial. I should much like to know what and who these beings are, that is, "with what body do they come" and of what grade of intelligence. I ask because, 1st, I have myself seen, known, and felt such beings at different times through their manipulation of the finer elements of matter about us; 2d, I am sure Theosophy is able to enlighten me, and, since they have taken the initiation of intercourse, the question seems proper.*

*W. Q. J.*—Without claiming any authority on this matter, it seems to me that the "intelligent beings" are in most cases elementals, of which there are some of very high grade but all of which are below the human as to soul and conscience. They do not in the end lead to good, but most frequently to the opposite. The door once open to them, others of any sort may just as well come in. But every case of the sort experienced by the questioner is not necessarily the coming of any other intelligence than one of the many interior selfs we are made up of; many of them may be the production of the power of the person's own astral body which has had some education retained in itself in some other life and now only kept back by Karma and environment. Such is the case with many mediums who do strange things, using their own astral senses and members without at the time knowing that such is the method, just as a man may walk quite well in his sleep. And as it is taught in all good books on this, the elemental world, acting with the inner principles of living men and with the strong shells of gross persons and the astral bodies of those in the astral world who are not wholly dead but live in the passions and astral bodies, is able to "mould matter" in many strange ways and to bring about phenomena of a remarkable character. A simple thought evolved in a definite manner and with a certain intensity will, acting automatically with an elemental, produce a rap

of great or small force, and may also bring about sensation, such as sight and feeling and hearing. If, however, a seemingly higher order of intelligence had taken the initiative, one should then exercise the very greatest care, as it is certain such intercourse cannot yet be carried on without a disturbance in the system that is for this age out of the normal. But what exactly each experience is or may be would have to be decided on its own merits and by one who could look behind the veil.

## QUESTION CCLXX.

*Are Plane and Principle ever interchangeable terms? Can a Principle be said to be a Plane of the working of the next higher Plane, i.e. as Buddhi is the vehicle of Atma, or the ethereal double necessary as the bridge for Prâna to cross over to the physical body? May they be said to be analogous to Spirit and Matter, opposite poles of the same thing?*

*W. Q. J.*—It does not seem to be right to try to interchange these two words, for it will result in mixing up the ideas. A plane is, like a plane surface, quite different from a principle, just as gas is different from the place in which it may exist and be felt. Plane of consciousness is used to designate the stage or metaphysical place the consciousness has reached or may be on or in. But to say that a principle of this plane is a plane for some higher state is very mixed, for it would result that thereby our individuality would be lost and all be reduced to annihilation. Whereas as each individual retains his identity and thus must preserve the identity of his principles, whatever those are, it must follow that his principles are not planes but remain as before principles. However, it must be remembered that the word "principle" is used loosely, and sometimes that which is not such is so called. It is easy and definite to retain the actual meaning of "plane" and not try to mix it with some other word. I cannot see any analogy between these two words and "spirit and matter," inasmuch as *plane* means a place for operation or use and *principle* is that which uses or operates on a plane.

*Ans.*—But as to the notion of Spirit and Matter being opposite poles of the same substance, it might be well to read EORUM 42, page 2, afterwards digesting it thouroughly.

## QUESTION CCLXXI.

*Does not the law of Karma set men an example to be retaliative, since the workings of that law are essentially retaliative in retribution, apparently enforcing "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth"? Or should we not look upon the law as retaliative or retributive at all, only our short-sighted conception of justice making it appear so?*

*W. Q. J.*—I do not understand how any one could imagine that the law of Karma, rightly understood, could lead one to retaliation. Certainly a law such as this cannot "set an example", for that infers the action of a being such as a God, or other being. The law of Karma should not be regarded as a law of retaliation, because retaliation again infers the action of a being and not the working of law. Karma is the working out of effect from cause, as well as the creation of cause from which an effect must follow. Hence Karma is completely merciful, because justice and mercy in their highest aspect are one. The exact result must follow the cause, and from every act will flow many effects, both good and bad. Those who wish to have an excuse for retaliation can of course warp any law to their own ends, and the way to warp the law of Karma so as to support retaliation is to talk of it as setting an example, or doing some other thing which can only be performed by an individual with conscience, intelligence, and responsibility.

*Ans.*—The law of Karma, like any other law, implies establishment by a law-giver, since laws do not originate of themselves. A law is an effect. It necessitates the preëxistence of an intelligent conviction that the law is necessary, salutary, and right, and of the will and the power to ordain and sustain it. Indeed, without this union of conviction and power in the law-making agency the existence of any law at all is hardly conceivable, since otherwise there would be no purpose,

no continuity, no uniformity,—three factors necessary to the conception of a "law." But conviction and power inhere only in a being, for they mean intelligence and will, and these cannot exist as mere abstractions or apart from a conscious subject. Hence a law, which is not a casual occurrence without assignable cause, but an effect presupposing reason and volition in a conscious being, must exhibit the character of the being ordaining it.

The law of Karma prescribes that the effects of an action shall be qualitatively and quantitatively exact. It admits no accident, perturbation, or inequality. It is, in other words, an expression of the law-giver's conviction that right results can only come from strict adherence to right, and thus is a manifestation of the law-giver's character as thoroughly wise and just. Now as this law pervades all spheres and affects all beings within them, it must have come from the Great First Cause, and therefore demonstrates that in that First Cause, inaccessible to human thought except through its manifestations, wisdom and justice have an infinite existence and operation.

Karmic law ensuring qualitative and quantitative exactness to effects, it is, of course, retributive in its workings in morals. But retribution is not only so as to evil; it is equally so as to good. There is absolute certainty that every wrong will be requited, but equal certainty that every right will be rewarded. Hence we cannot regard it as only making sure of "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," since this is but its side to evil-doers: is it just as expressive of "a gift for a gift, and a blessing for a blessing." If we have any wish to emulate it, we need to keep ever before us its double-sidedness, its inerrant justice, its perfect working. To suppose that we imitated it by only studying retaliation would be as one-sided as to suppose that we could be truly Karmic by recklessly distributing alms without any concern as to the worthiness of the recipients. Those who desire to pattern after the Divine character, whether in Karma or anything else, may well remember the counsel of Jesus, "Be ye perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect."

Of course every human effort after any moral quality must fall short, yet it is entirely possible that prevalent lack of jus-

tice may be from indifference to and want of imitation of Karma. As has been before now pointed out, the sense of justice is the most abstract and refined of all human qualities, the one implying the longest prior preparation and the most effective detachment from self as an aim or as an influence. To be truly just means clear vision, unperverted judgment, entire absence of preference, prejudice, or distortion. In effort to reach the Karmic standard there is certainly more danger of hardness than of excessive leniency, and hence the need of incessant care against that error, but this does not disprove the obligation to study and to practice the high and noble quality of justice, that quality which is embodied so perfectly in the Karmic Law. Many a lesson we can learn from it, a lesson to brace up the moral sense, to discard flabbiness of moral judgment, to insist on right as a fact and not a name, to puncture self-delusions and self-loves, to view our interiors from an objective standpoint, to get rounded conceptions of truth, to perceive the far-reaching consequences of just treatment. The law of Karma does set us an example, but it is a very broad and fine one.

## QUESTION CCLXXII.

*What is the source of Conscience? From what plane does it come? Why does the savage delight in cruelty to his enemy, and the so-called enlightened man in sharp practices which the really enlightened know to be wrong? In other words, is Conscience a matter of education?*

*W. Q. J.*—Conscience seems to be a faculty which may be stilled or made active. In my opinion its source is in the Higher Self, and as it comes down through plane after plane it loses its force or retains power according to the life and education of the being on earth. The conscience of the savage is limited by his education just as were the consciences of the New Englander and the European religionists who destroyed men for the sake of God and Christ. We cannot assert that the men who indulged in religious persecution were not going according to what they called their conscience. By this I do not

mean that conscience is a matter of education, but that the power of its utterances will be limited by our education, and consequently if we have a bigoted religion or a non-philosophical system we are likely to prevent ourselves from hearing from our conscience. And in those cases where men are doing wrong according to what they call their conscience, it must be true that they have so warped their intuition as not to understand the voice of the inward monitor.

*Ans.*—The delight of savages in cruelty and of civilized men in sharp practices raises no problem in conscience, for these things are exhibitions of human tendency to revenge and greed, not any more remarkable than other wrongs, say ingratitude, anger, or treachery. Men do not always follow such conscience as they have, often doing things because they like to, whether good or evil, and being quite indifferent to their moral quality. But the problem arises when, being sincere men, they do things contrary to conscience, or, stranger yet, when they do under pressure of conscience things utterly opposed to morality and right. The best example of the latter is the one referred to by "W. Q. J."—religious persecution. The most eminent persecutors have often been men of genuine, even austere, piety, and they committed the most atrocious outrages in torture and murder because they believed themselves to thus serve God and to protect His children from eternal suffering. The contradiction is so palpable that we can at first hardly suppose it explicable.

And yet the explanation is that conscience, though a God-given faculty impelling to right action, only distinguishes the right through illumination by the intellect. To put it otherwise, conscience prompts to act truly, but which of several actions is true has to be determined by intelligence. Conscience is thus the motor, intelligence the guide; conscience the engine propelling the movement, intelligence the rudder directing it to a fit end. So long as men have the impulse to fulfill duty, and yet are uncertain or misled as to what that duty is, so long will they either flounder in doubts or perpetrate evils. This can only be avoided by clear perception of truth in ethics

and morals. But truth in these departments is evolved as is truth elsewhere, *i.e.*, by slow stages, through many mistakes, after repeated disciplines. The nature of an act is seen as its consequences work themselves out; the rights of men are perceived as are disclosed the effects of denying them. Very gradually arises a faint suspicion of the essential equality of mankind, that every other human being's inherent prerogatives are as inviolable as our own, that we have no more and no fewer than he When this becomes distinct, solid, it is competent to guide conscientious impulse. For it means a clear perception that we have no God-given commission, even permission, to traverse others' rights, that the Golden Rule is the epitome of duty, that only self-injury can come from aggression. This once realized, the function of conscience has just play. Conscience prompts to scrupulous respect to those rights of our fellow-beings which intelligence has discovered.

Perhaps another way of putting the case may be accurate. If conscience is a principle of the spiritual, the Buddhic, nature, it may need Manas, or the Mind principle, to give it correct embodiment. That mind principle has been slowly unfolding through the ages, and until sufficiently unfolded cannot make the embodiment of Buddhi correct. Much has been accomplished in late years; many acts formerly tolerated or even approved are now seen vile; others will undergo like change of color; the moral sense will gain increased enlightenment; in time men's conceptions will be remodelled on the lines of a correct philosophy and religion; cruelty and fraud will be as odious as persecution is now; truth in ethics and morals will stand in full sunlight; conscience will be as potent as intelligence is clear.

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*Verbatim Report of addresses at Theosophical Congress, Parliament of Religions, Chicago, September 15th and 16th, will be mailed by General Secretary T.S. for 30 cents, paper, 75 cents, cloth.*